

Washington, D.C. - Rep. Peter Welch (VT-AL) today supported a House-passed bill to crack down on gas price gouging.

Welch spoke this morning at a Capitol press conference supporting the passage of H.R. 6346, The Energy Price Gouging Prevention Act, which gives the Federal Trade Commission the authority to investigate and punish companies that artificially inflate the price of energy. The bill sets criminal penalties for price gouging, and permits states to bring lawsuits against wholesalers or retailers who engage in gouging.

"Vermonters and all Americans are being squeezed by skyrocketing gas prices. We should throw the book at companies hiding behind high oil prices in a scheme to charge even more for gasoline," said Welch. "The message in this legislation is straightforward: if you rip off the public by charging excessive gas prices, you will pay a fine and do time."

Under the new legislation, the Justice Department can impose criminal penalties of up to \$150 million on corporations, and fines of up to \$2 million and jail sentences of up to 10 years for individuals.

The bill directs that the penalties will go to help fund the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Under the bill, the FTC would consider whether the amount charged grossly exceeds the price of competing sellers or are attributable to market conditions. The FTC will be directed to focus enforcement on companies with sales in excess of \$500 million per year.

On May 23, 2007, Welch supported and the House approved a similar bill, the Federal Energy Price Gouging Prevention Act, H.R. 1252, by a bipartisan vote of 284 to 141.

Later this week, Welch will support and the House is expected to consider "Use it or Lose it" legislation to force oil companies to produce oil and gas or diligently develop the 68 million acres of public land they already have leased. It will also consider legislation to fund public transportation to help reduce fares for riders.